

A Whole University Framework for Mental Health



MHFA England

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Mental Health First Aid starts with you

If you are reading this you are already thinking about how to improve the mental health of your organisation.

Here you will find a ready to use framework to support student and staff wellbeing. Read on for best practice examples of how universities and their stakeholders are using Mental Health First Aid training to build healthy, supportive environments to study, work and live.

You will also see the personal stories of students and staff who have chosen to share the impact Mental Health First Aid has had on them.



MHFA England

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Mental health in higher education: The scope of the issue

A person's wellbeing has a profound impact on their success in work, study and life. As with all employers and places of learning, universities have the duty to promote good mental health for staff and students alike.

Students

The pressures of the transition between youth and adulthood can trigger mental ill health or exacerbate existing mental health issues. Young adulthood is a common age of onset for mental health issues, with 75% of diagnosable mental illnesses established by age 24.¹ Many more go undiagnosed and untreated.

The student population faces plenty of factors which make access to appropriate support particularly crucial. Difficulties such as moving away from established support networks for the first time, the cultural shock of being in a new area or country, academic pressure, financial worries, unprecedented debt and the uncertainty of the job market can all impact on student mental health.

A recent NUS poll of 1,093 students found that almost eight out of 10 (78%) had experienced mental health issues over the last year – and yet less than half had sought support. Reasons given for not seeking support included not knowing where to go for mental health support at their college or university (33%) and being nervous about the support they would receive (40%).²

The same survey found that 33% of the students had suicidal thoughts – around double the incidence for the general population³ - rising to 55% for LGBTQ+ students. These are alarming figures, particularly given that suicide is the leading cause of death for men and women in their early twenties.⁴

75% of mental illnesses
are established
by age 24¹

¹ Mental Health Foundation, 2015: **Fundamental Facts about Mental Health**

² National Union of Students, 2015: **All Party Parliamentary Group on Students briefing**

³ The Health & Social Care Information Centre, 2007: **Adult psychiatric morbidity in England survey**

⁴ Office for National Statistics, 2015: **What are the top causes of death by age and gender?**

66% of academics with mental health issues say their ill health is directly related to work⁶

Staff

University staff likewise face challenges to their mental health, with burnout and stress common from PhD students to vice-chancellors. The Universities and Colleges Employers Association reports that in 2014/15 mental ill health accounted for 20.7% of days lost for employees, an increase from 2013/14.⁵

Research by the Guardian⁶ and the University and College Union⁷ has highlighted issues affecting all levels of the academic hierarchy, including isolation, lack of support, long hours and a normalised culture of overwork, a competitive and bullying culture in some disciplines, and increasing internal and external scrutiny with conflicting pressures from university league tables, student satisfaction surveys and research league tables. According to the Guardian survey, two thirds of academics with mental health issues – the most common reported being anxiety, depression and panic attacks – said their health issues were a direct result of their university job.

Despite high stress levels across the board in higher education, university staff often feel unable to disclose mental health issues to their employer, citing lack of awareness of what support is available, how to access it, and most commonly fear of stigma and discrimination – mirroring the trends among students.

Low and inaccurate disclosure rates raise a number of issues for universities. A report by the Equality Challenge Unit points out that when people do not feel comfortable to disclose their health issues, they are not likely to be receiving the support they require, impacting on staff and student retention and achievement. Furthermore, higher education organisations may not be able to meet their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 when people feel unable to disclose. Without holding accurate information, organisations cannot improve any processes that may disadvantage staff and students with mental health issues, and are thus unable to provide an inclusive environment.⁸

⁵ Universities & Colleges Employers Association, 2015: **Sickness Absence Survey**

⁶ Guardian **survey of 2,561 academics**, 2014

⁷ University and College Union, 2013: **Higher stress: A survey of stress and well-being among staff in higher education**

⁸ Equality Challenge Unit, 2015: **Understanding adjustments: supporting staff and students who are experiencing mental health difficulties**

**78% of students
report experiencing
a mental health issue
in the last year**



Resources for a healthy university

“Healthy learners and healthy staff will increase levels of achievement, performance, productivity and reputation – helping universities conduct their core business more effectively.”
UK Healthy Universities Network⁹

Whole university approach

Reflecting on the success of holistic 'healthy settings' initiatives in other sectors such as Healthy Schools and Healthy Further Education, the UK Healthy Universities Network have designed a framework for embedding wellbeing across a whole organisation.

Evidence shows that a consistent framework driving cultural change and focusing on prevention is the most efficient way to tackle all aspects of ill health, and that single-focus reactive interventions are not effective in the long term.

Healthy Universities describes a wealth of potential benefits to applying a 'whole university approach', ranging from core business priorities to long term impacts on the wider community:

- A more motivated and supported workforce
- Reduced costs associated with sickness absence
- Improved student experience and retention
- Improved health and wellbeing of staff and students
- Putting health and wellbeing formally on the university agenda
- Opportunities for participation and developing health partnerships
- Strengthened capacity and capability to contribute to the pursuit of a range of public service agreements¹⁰

The diagram overleaf outlines a simplified healthy settings approach applied to higher education. The full report from Healthy Universities contains an expanded model along with detailed guidance and implementation methods.¹⁰

Further resources to support the whole university approach include:

UK Healthy Universities Network toolkit

Online self-review tool with guidance packages for universities to gauge their progress in creating a healthy whole university environment. Available at healthyuniversities.ac.uk/toolkit-and-resources

Universities UK good practice guide

A good practice guide to student wellbeing which highlights the instrumental areas of policy and procedure to focus on. Available at universitiesuk.ac.uk

Student Minds university accommodation guidance pack

Recommendations for accommodation providers on how to support student mental health and collaborate across the whole university. Available at studentminds.org.uk/accommodation.html

ProtectED accreditation scheme

ProtectED is the first UK higher education accreditation scheme for safety, security and wellbeing. Learn more at protect-ed.org

UCEA employee engagement toolkit

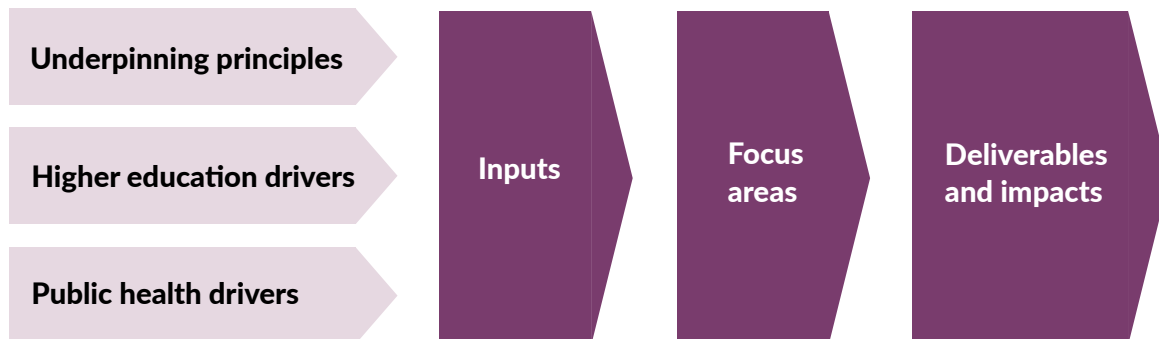
The University and Colleges Employers Association in partnership with Universities Human Resources offer a joint toolkit for employee engagement at ucea.ac.uk

⁹ Healthy Universities, 2017: **Context & Rationale**

¹⁰ Healthy Universities, 2010: **Concept, Model and Framework for Applying the Healthy Settings Approach within Higher Education in England**

Whole university approach

A simplified whole university model (Healthy Universities, 2010)



Underpinning principles

- Equality and diversity
- Participation and empowerment
- Partnership
- Sustainability
- Holistic and whole system health
- Evidence-informed and innovative practice
- Evaluation, learning and knowledge exchange

Higher education drivers

- Student recruitment, retention, experience and achievement
- Staff performance
- Organisational productivity

Public health drivers

- Inequalities
- Alcohol
- Mental wellbeing
- Obesity, food and physical activity
- Sexual health
- Climate change

Inputs

- Students
- Staff
- Partner agencies
- Knowledge and understanding
- Financial resources
- Environmental resources

Focus areas

- Create healthy and sustainable learning, working and living environments
- Integrate health and sustainable development as multi-disciplinary cross-cutting themes in curricula, research and knowledge exchange
- Contribute to the health, wellbeing and sustainability of local, regional, national and global communities

Deliverables

- Supportive working and learning contexts
- High quality health and welfare services
- Healthy and sustainable food procurement processes and catering services
- Appropriate range of widely used sports, leisure, social and cultural facilities

- Holistic approach to personal, social and citizenship development
- Increased understanding of, commitment to and sense of personal responsibility for health and sustainable development among students and staff
- Strengthened institution-level commitment to practice corporate responsibility and to lead for health and sustainability in local, regional, national and global partnerships

Impacts

- Improved business performance and productivity, enhanced student and staff recruitment, retention and achievement
- Strengthened capacity and capability to contribute to the pursuit of a range of public service agreements
- Increased positive and reduced negative institutional impacts on health and environmental sustainability
- A throughput of engaged students and staff exerting a positive influence as local and global citizens within families, communities, workplaces and political processes

How Mental Health First Aid can help

Our training is here to help the higher education community address the epidemic of mental ill health. We can support you to manage wellbeing proactively for a healthy university.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training is designed to:

- **Give people the tools to keep themselves, their colleagues, students and peers healthy**
- **Empower them to access support when it's needed, for a faster recovery**
- **Allow people with a long term mental health issue or disability to thrive in work or study**
- **Stop preventable issues arising by building a supportive culture around mental health**

Practical training to empower

Good quality mental health training is the foundation to any mentally healthy setting. Educating people about their mental health can not only break down stigma but also give them the tools to proactively look after their wellbeing and that of those around them. It promotes recovery by making sure people are aware that mental health issues are a normal part of life, that recovery is possible, and how to get support.

MHFA training is one evidence-based, sustainable way of meeting the good practice recommendations for student wellbeing set out by Universities UK, which recommends mental health awareness training for staff and students. Universities UK describes this training as crucial for academic and related departments, service and support areas, frontline and auxiliary staff, personal tutors, house/hall tutors and departmental disability officers - and suggests it also be "cascaded to staff who have a front line role including cleaners, canteen and library staff".¹¹

Moreover, research conducted by Student Minds found that student peer supporters would find such training, information and advice helpful in supporting their friends with mental ill health, while looking after their own wellbeing.¹²

Embed cultural change

As the case studies included within this brochure illustrate, MHFA training can bring about a wider cultural change reducing stigma towards mental health.

When people feel safe to disclose mental ill health and are met with a supportive response from their organisation, they are more likely to access the services needed for recovery or management of symptoms. Meanwhile, with a positive culture around mental health the organisation is able to make reasonable adjustments so that the person can continue their work or study with minimal impact.

We recommend giving a range of people across the organisation the skills and confidence to support their peers, colleagues and tutees. Please see the **training framework** provided in the next section for more detail.

Complement existing strategies

Many higher education organisations are using MHFA training programmes as part of their strategy for wellbeing. We're keen to work with organisations who are taking a healthy settings approach to mental health, including training staff and students in MHFA. We'll work alongside you to deliver training that complements and enhances your existing wellbeing provision and strategy, if you have one. If you don't, we can get you started on that journey and guide you along the way.

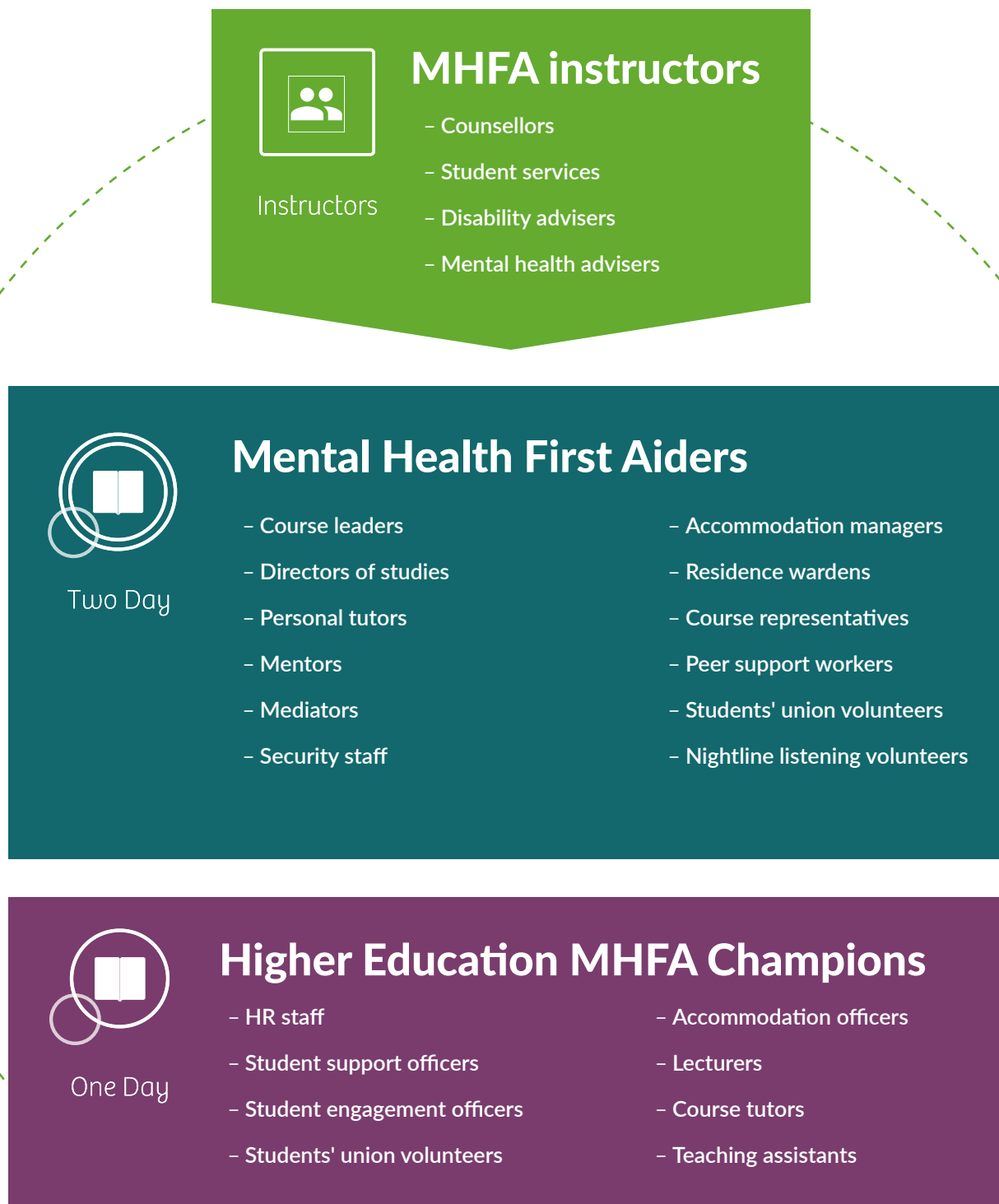
We have training options to suit a range of timescales and budgets, from introductory mental health awareness sessions to a full Mental Health First Aider qualification. We balance training requirements with the responsibilities of your staff and students, fitting into the busy academic calendar. Working closely with the Higher Education network, we can also link you to other resources and organisations around mental health.

¹¹ Universities UK, 2015: **Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good practice guide** (1110)

¹² Student Minds, 2016: **Looking after a mate**

Training framework

We believe that training people at a blend of levels throughout your organisation is the most effective way to create a healthy, supportive environment. This diagram shows an example MHFA training framework for a whole organisation and its community.



**Mental Health Aware:
whole university population**

Choosing the most suitable MHFA course for each person will depend on their role, responsibilities, availability, level of involvement and opportunity to support others. Please note that the framework shown here is not prescriptive and there are a range of methods and products for creating a supportive, mentally healthy university environment. We are happy to provide consultation and guidance to help you create a training framework to suit the needs of your organisation.

MHFA instructors

For a cost effective and self-sustaining way to roll out MHFA training to larger numbers of people, many organisations choose to train a member of staff as an MHFA instructor who can deliver the course to colleagues, partner organisations and other members of the community.

Learn more about our Royal Society for Public Health accredited instructor training programme on **page 28**.

Mental Health First Aiders

Our two day course qualifies you as a Mental Health First Aider. It is not bespoke to a university environment but has been designed to work across sectors.

Mental Health First Aiders have:

- An in depth understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect wellbeing
- Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues
- Confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress
- Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening
- Knowledge to help someone recover their health by guiding them to further support - whether that's self-help resources, university counselling services, the NHS, or a mix

Learn more about the course on **page 27**.

Higher Education MHFA Champions

Our one day course was developed in consultation with Student Minds specifically for the Higher Education sector, and trains you as an MHFA Champion.

Higher Education MHFA Champions have:

- An understanding of the issues that relate to student and staff mental health
- Skills and confidence to advocate for mental health awareness and support a culture of positive wellbeing
- Practical skills to spot signs of mental ill health and guide a person to a place of support

Learn more about the course on **page 26**.

Awareness for the whole university

Alongside the more involved training for all staff and students in pastoral roles, and of course the specialist training for those employed to work specifically with students with ongoing mental health issues, the 'Good practice guide to student mental wellbeing' from Universities UK recommends raising awareness about key mental health topics across the whole university population. The following guidance should be disseminated to the whole university community:

- How to identify that a person is experiencing emotional distress and may have a mental health issue
- How to identify if a situation is urgent or non-urgent and what to do in both cases
- How to respond both inside and outside office hours
- How to react if the student or staff member refuses help
- A list of all the support services offered in the organisation and how to access them
- How to handle critical incidents regarding mental ill health
- A list of emergency numbers including police and local hospitals
- A brief on confidentiality and data protection procedures (who information can be shared with, when, and what implications of disclosure might be)¹³

¹³ Universities UK, 2015: **Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good practice guide**

Evaluation and outcomes

Since its beginnings in Australia in 2000, MHFA has an international track record of evaluations demonstrating that the training makes a lasting difference in people's lives. Below are some of the highlights, and you can find a full summary of research into MHFA at mhfaengland.org.

Higher Education MHFA pilot study

Cregan, K., Phipps, D. & Lowndes, J., 2016
University of Chester
Submitted for publication. Summary available at healthyuniversities.ac.uk

The pilot of the Higher Education MHFA One Day course set out to address the question: **Can an MHFA course designed for higher education improve knowledge and confidence within a university in relation to a variety of mental health issues?**

173 staff and 17 students from 16 universities who self-selected to attend the MHFA course took a questionnaire before and after the course. In 72% of respondents, completing the course significantly increased their understanding of mental health as well as their confidence in being able to help those with signs of mental ill health.

The study concluded that the Higher Education MHFA course is **"a positive way forward in developing good practice specifically within Higher Education"**.

Equipping the nurses of the future

Fessey, V., James, G. & Pengelly, T., 2016
Coventry University
British Journal of Nursing

Second year nursing students at Coventry University were asked to self-evaluate their confidence levels in supporting people with a mental health issue both before and after attending an MHFA course. They reported a marked improvement in confidence, knowledge and skills for helping people in emotional distress.

The study concluded that the introduction of MHFA training into current nursing curricula is a step towards encouraging nursing students to develop a more person-centred approach to care.

Meeting public health priorities

Patterson, P. & Pearson, L., 2013
University of Birmingham & Coventry University
Presented at Public Health England annual conference

This large-scale study analysed course feedback forms from 11,502 people who attended MHFA courses between October 2011 and December 2012. It found:

- Personal confidence of how to best support others with a mental health issue increased on average by 3.5 points (from 4.49- 7.99/10)
- Knowledge and understanding of how to best support others with a mental health issue increased on average by 3.78 points (from 4.42-8.2/10)
- Both pre- and post-course confidence in how to help someone were highly correlated with knowledge of how to support others (correlation of .89 and .8 respectively)
- 96.6% of delegates further rated the training as very good/good

The study concluded that MHFA training met public health priorities by increasing mental health literacy.

International MHFA

For further reading, evaluations of MHFA programmes across the globe can be found at mhfa.com.au.

An effective public health intervention

Hadlaczky, G. et al., 2014
International Review of Psychiatry

A meta-analysis of international MHFA evaluations found that MHFA programmes increase participants' knowledge regarding mental health, decrease negative attitudes, and increase supportive behaviours towards individuals with mental health issues. The meta-analysis concluded that MHFA is recommendable as a public health intervention.

Feedback

On this page you will find feedback we have received from people who have been on an MHFA course in their organisation. Comments have been gathered through research interviews and course evaluation forms.

“This was a fantastic course. It was really well run and the level of participation and valuing of contribution was great.”

“Gaining more up-to-date knowledge about mental health has given me more confidence in myself.”

“I’ve had a colleague experience mental ill health before, and I now can better spot the signs earlier and should it happen again I can offer the most appropriate support.”

“Excellent course that has given me a much better understanding of mental health issues and how they affect people and the workplace.”

“Overall I thought the course was very informative and has greatly increased my knowledge in all aspects relating to mental health. I thoroughly enjoyed the two days! I can now put in to practice what I have learnt.”

“Straight after the first session I was able to use (MHFA techniques) with a student (who) had anxiety and panic attacks for a number of years. By listening, reassuring her and helping her to recognise her mental health she became more confident in discussing her concerns and we were able to give her the appropriate help during her examinations.”

“The training is inclusive, in that it enables those who do not have a grounding in mental health to understand and feel empowered to act when they are concerned about the mental health needs of their students.”

“It is the structured approach of the course and the supporting materials that makes it so practical and a fantastic tool to have at our fingertips.”

“Very useful course - good to reflect not only on mental health conversations, but getting the relationship and trust right for all conversations.”

Case study: Anglia Ruskin University

“We introduced the MHFA training to raise awareness. It was about educating, reducing stigma, but also to support the staff in supporting students.”

Started MHFA training

February 2014

Staff trained so far

130

“I feel so lucky to be in an organisation that was able to train me as an MHFA instructor. I really enjoy running the courses, and they make a really big difference to the participants.”

**Alison Hunte,
Counsellor and Placement
Co-ordinator**

Anglia Ruskin University is a public university in East Anglia which is renowned for its world-leading research facilities. The university has over 39,400 students across three campuses in Cambridge, Chelmsford and Peterborough, with 26,000 at the largest campus in Cambridge.

Alison Hunte, the university's Student Counsellor and Placement Co-ordinator, is a qualified Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) instructor and is responsible for running training courses across all three campuses. The two day training course is offered to all staff through the HR training program, and student reps have also had access to the training on a course funded by the Student Union.

Why we started training

Anglia Ruskin is a unique university in the provision it has for mental health and wellbeing support for all students and staff, offering a wide range of workshops, programs and support services, including counselling and online CBT. The decision to introduce MHFA training was part of this wellbeing program. “We introduced the course to raise awareness,” Alison says. “It was about educating, reducing stigma, and to give accurate information and guidance to staff.”

The course was initially proposed by a member of staff who had completed the training in another organisation and reported positive outcomes. This led to an agreement that the university would benefit from implementing the same training. To make it sustainable, the decision was taken to train staff members to become in-house MHFA instructors. Since then Alison says uptake of the courses has been popular, with most courses offered completely full with between 12–14 participants.

100%

of staff trained would recommend the course to a colleague

“Almost universally people say that they got loads out of the course, and that it’s improved their knowledge. They feel more confident in talking to people and it’s helped to destigmatise mental health.”

One of the key benefits being reported around MHFA training is that staff now feel able to offer initial support to students in situations where signposts of mental ill health are more likely to arise. “We wanted to support the staff in supporting students. Although we offer a counselling service, a lot of students in distress don’t come to us. Other staff in all kinds of roles in the rest of the university find themselves dealing with students who are experiencing mental health issues and this training enables them to support and guide a student to find the help they need.”

Results

Feedback for the MHFA training has been overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of trained staff reporting they would recommend the course to a colleague. Staff reported feeling more confident in supporting students with their mental wellbeing, rather than feeling the need to turn to counselling services for initial support.

“Almost universally people say that they got loads out of the course, and that it’s improved their knowledge. They feel more confident in talking to people and it’s helped to destigmatise mental health. I think it also increases peoples’ capacity to be kind to each other, which is really important.”

The training has also raised the profile of the existing counselling service and created an important link to support that is available, that some staff were previously unaware of. “We have a higher profile so that people feel more able to raise concerns with us directly. We get staff talking to us more about their concerns, and we can intervene more quickly with some students.”

Alison herself is a big supporter of the course, and says it has had a significant impact on her life. “I feel so lucky that I was in an organisation that was able to train me as an MHFA instructor. I really enjoy running the courses, and they make a really big difference to the participants.”

What the future holds

The university already has a wide range of support available to students and staff, but Alison believes there’s room for more. The next step is to train more staff as instructors so courses can be run more frequently. “I currently run the course twice a year on different campuses, but that is about as many as I can fit in around my main role, so we’d like to train more staff to run it.”

Until now the course has been funded by the HR department and was only available to staff, but after a successful pilot that saw a course for student reps funded by the Student Union, Alison is keen to roll out the training for students as well as staff. There’s also an initiative underway to create a list of all MHFA participants so that students can easily locate trained staff members within their faculty or building and turn to them for support.

Case study: King's College London

“If we can provide the right support for early intervention, students have a better outcome and can engage with their studies here, whether they have a diagnosis or not.”

Started MHFA training

January 2015

Staff trained so far

650+

“By informing, supporting and raising awareness around mental health for all King’s staff, we are then better equipped to support King’s students... and by looking after ourselves we increase our capacity to look after each other.”

Stephanie Griffiths,
Associate Director and Head of
Counselling and Mental Health
Support

For one of the world’s highest ranking research universities, supporting the wellbeing of over 8,000 staff and 29,000 students over five campuses spread across the city is a vital undertaking. In a true whole university approach, their commitment to mental health is reflected at all levels, from resident wardens to PhD supervisors to the President and Principal.

Why we started training

Jo Levy is Head of Counselling (Outreach and Training) at King’s, and as a clinical psychotherapist she knows how crucial it is to take preventative action for mental ill health. Jo says: “75% of mental health issues start before the age of 18 so we have a lot of students coming in with pre-existing symptoms, needing support. If we can provide the right support for early intervention, students have a better outcome and can engage with their studies here, whether they have a diagnosis or not.”

The university counselling service has seen a steady rise in demand over the last decade, a pattern seen across

the sector¹, and realised they needed to act to tackle stigma and increase access to support. In 2014 King’s signed the **Time to Change Pledge** as part of their new strategy for mental health.

The commitment comes right from the top as the university’s President and Principal, Professor Edward Byrne, is passionate about mental health: “At King’s we are committed to reducing stigma and discrimination around mental health. By delivering mental health training to all staff, we hope to raise awareness across our whole community. By supporting our staff we will be better placed to support our students and to become world leaders in this area.”

As part of the pledge, £500,000 in funding was allocated to expand mental health provision, supporting the introduction of a team of mental health advisers to the counselling service, and creating a wellbeing team to promote health across the university.

¹ Universities UK, 2015: **Student mental wellbeing in higher education: Good practice guide**

“By delivering mental health training to all King’s staff, we hope to raise awareness across our whole community. By supporting our staff we will be better placed to support our students and to become world leaders in this area.” Professor Edward Byrne, President and Principal

“The head of the directorate had been on an MHFA course and thought it was most appropriate option out there for what we wanted to achieve university-wide,” says Jo, who leads on the provision of mental health training for the university.

It wasn’t hard to make the business case for the training: “We just looked at retention for staff and students. If by making Mental Health First Aiders available we can save even two students from dropping out, or even two members of staff from taking a sickness absence, we’re saving the university money.”

Jo and three of her colleagues went on the MHFA Instructor Training programme to qualify to deliver courses in-house. For the past two years they have run Adult MHFA Two Day and Half Day courses monthly, and are now rolling out the newly launched Higher Education MHFA One Day specialist course.

Results

The training has been well-received and Jo and her colleagues have now trained over 650 staff from a range of departments across the university. “We have had a really good take up,” says Jo. “We started by offering the half day awareness course as we thought staff wouldn’t be able to spare the full two days to become a Mental Health First Aider. But it turned out there was a huge demand for the two day course and it has been fully booked with a waiting list ever since.”

The course is not mandatory for university staff as Jo and her team wanted people with an interest in learning to support their students and colleagues to sign up voluntarily. Student facing staff – library services, student services, administrators, personal tutors and supervisors - were encouraged by their heads of department to take the training for professional development in one of the key skills for their role.

Students attend the courses too, with welfare reps from student societies, peer supporters and resident wardens all taking a Half Day course as part of their induction training. “The wardens are on call in their halls of residence,” Jo explains, “so it’s really beneficial for them to have a grounding in a basic understanding of supporting mental health.”

Jo has had consistent feedback that the mixture of lived-experience film clips, group activities and presentations make the learning real and relatable. The courses are also bringing colleagues together around a subject that has been taboo in the workplace for too long. “You get people who work in the same department but have never spoken to each other until they are in my training room. They find themselves in a non-judgemental environment where they can speak openly about mental health, sometimes for the first time.”

What the future holds


King’s College London will continue to expand the work on staff and student mental health in 2018. The counselling service are collaborating with the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience to evaluate and develop existing programmes. To keep up with the ongoing demand for MHFA training, another of Jo’s colleagues will be training as an MHFA instructor to increase their capacity to deliver courses.

The outlook at King’s is summarised by Stephanie Griffiths, the Associate Director and Head of Counselling and Mental Health Support, who says: “By informing, supporting and raising awareness around mental health for all King’s staff, we are then better equipped to support King’s students, and by looking after ourselves we increase our capacity to look after each other.”

Jo shares this vision, and says her goal for the university is for “an environment where we can all talk as openly about mental health as we can about physical health. Where my colleagues wouldn’t think twice about telling me they are struggling.”

Watch a video showing Jo and her colleagues in action at kcl.ac.uk/campuslife/services/counselling/Online-resources/Training-for-staff.aspx

Case study: University of Sunderland



"We identified MHFA as a pragmatic way to increase awareness of mental health and to foster a university culture where staff and students are empowered to talk about mental wellbeing as part of everyday life."

Started MHFA training

2010

Staff trained so far

70 support and teaching staff

"I look forward to continuing to develop this network in the coming years as we work collaboratively between HR and Student Services to develop our 'whole University approach' to mental health"

**Louise Phillipson,
Head of Health, Safety
and the Environment**

The University of Sunderland is a leading anchor institution in North East England with a student population of around 20,000 and teaching and support staff of 1,400. With a high proportion of students coming from the local region, the university has a significant impact on health, culture and wellbeing within local communities. When it comes to mental health and wellbeing Sunderland subscribes to a 'whole university' approach and strives to encourage a culture where mental health is normalised and staff and students feel empowered to talk about their mental health.

Speaking about her outlook on staff and student wellbeing, Louise Phillipson, Head of Health, Safety and Environment at the university explains, "In recent years we've been trying to put the 'health' back into health and safety in all kinds of ways,

including in our approach to mental health – this has involved everything from running wellbeing events, to setting up support groups, to provision of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training."

Why we started training

It was back in 2010 that Louise first began to explore MHFA training. "A survey of our staff and students' wellbeing highlighted a need for a greater focus on how we approach mental health internally. Following this my team and I were looking at practical ways to eliminate stigma surrounding mental illness and ways we could bring about culture change throughout the university to help normalise conversations around mental health. It was at this point that we first offered MHFA courses.

"We are all the university's most valuable resource. Any action we can take, no matter how small, to assist staff and students on their wellbeing journey can make a big difference and is worth doing."

"We chose this option due to the credibility and comprehensiveness of the course content, as well as its aim being not to create experts but to teach people how to identify, understand and help a person who may be developing a mental health issue."

A small number of Adult MHFA Two Day courses were first rolled out among selected support staff as a pilot, and following a positive reception the decision was taken to further offer the training to HR Managers, health and safety representatives and physical first aiders. "We identified MHFA as a pragmatic way to increase awareness of mental health and wellbeing and to help to foster a university culture where staff and students are empowered to be able to talk about mental wellbeing as part of everyday life."

Results

As part of the university's ongoing wellbeing drive, a Mental Health Champions Network was established in 2015 to provide a forum for those trained in MHFA to share experiences, best practice and arrange further training and wellbeing events. This network forms an important element of the university's strategic aim to continually improve mental health awareness and support for staff and students. This academic year alone, 678 students have been referred to student wellbeing and counselling services, highlighting how important it is to have this kind of network in place.

Louise comments, "Offering MHFA training on a voluntary basis has helped us to create a community of 45 enthusiastic Mental Health First Aiders whom we refer to as our Champions, predominantly in student-facing roles at both Sunderland and London campuses who are upskilled to support those experiencing mental health issues.

"MHFA training has played a key part in the cultural shift we're working to achieve and has helped to spark interest in our other initiatives. We're now seeing more referrals to our Occupational Health support team citing mental health conditions, indicating that staff feel more able to come forward, and greater involvement in our extensive programme of wellbeing events. These scheduled events are ongoing throughout the year to continually provide support and create a regular message to prevent stigma."

The university's approach looks to address staff and student wellbeing in equal measure, and recent staff survey results indicate a strong impact for the former, with 84% of staff agreeing that the university is effective in promoting and supporting staff wellbeing.

Talking about the importance of this approach, Sue Wynn, Occupational Health Manager, said: "There's no doubt we're living in a dramatically uncertain Higher Education environment and it's never been more important to look after ourselves as a workforce, ensuring we are as healthy as possible, both physically and mentally - we are all the university's most valuable resource. Any action

we can take, no matter how small, to assist staff and students on their wellbeing journey can make a big difference and is worth doing."

What the future holds

Although the University of Sunderland's Mental Health Champions Network is currently staff only, there are plans to train student Mental Health First Aiders and Champions as further MHFA courses are rolled out, including the recently developed Higher Education MHFA One Day course. To encourage broader representation from across the university community and to improve accessibility, Louise intends to target specific areas, such as the Student Union's Peer network, and encourage more people to sign up to the Mental Health Champions Network.

She explains, "As well as expanding the network, we're also investigating ways to make our Mental Health First Aiders more visible, including adding details about our Mental Health Champions Network to our student induction materials and advertising who they are and where they are based via our electronic noticeboards. I look forward to continuing to grow this network in the coming years, as we continue to work collaboratively between HR and Student Services to develop our 'whole university approach' to mental health".

Case study: University of York

"Ensuring that staff feel supported and cared for is a key part of why we have been able to achieve such high employee engagement, and we are going to continue this important work."

Started MHFA training

February 2016

Staff trained so far

One MHFA instructor

91 Mental Health First Aiders
(Two Day)

138 Mental Health Aware
(Half Day)

"Training an in-house MHFA instructor has given us 100% flexibility on when we deliver the courses, which is brilliant given the busy teaching timetables of academic staff."

Jo Hardy,
Health and Safety Adviser
and MHFA instructor

One of the world's leading universities is carving out a reputation for staff wellbeing as well as academia. With 17,405 students and 4,119 staff this year, the University of York takes seriously its duties to provide a healthy working environment.

In recent years this Russell Group university has launched a comprehensive staff Health and Wellbeing Project focusing on three core areas of health: 'Get fit', 'Eat well' and 'Feel good'. A key part of the university's strategy in this area is delivering Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) courses to its staff.

Why we started training

Helen Selvidge, Assistant HR Director, explains that there were three main drivers behind the focus on staff mental health as part of York University's Health and Wellbeing Project. "Like most organisations, the university has seen staff reporting stress over the past few years. While we had systems in place to assist staff such as an employee assistance programme and a good range of flexible working options, we identified an opportunity to provide another level of bespoke training to empower staff to understand issues around mental health and how to deal with them."

"It was essential for us to choose a training programme with a solid evidence base... The more we researched it the more we could see how MHFA would apply to any university community."

The second driver was the desire to tackle the university's leading cause of sickness absence. Helen says, "Overall universities tend to have low levels of absences compared to other employers, and so did we. However, mental health related illness – most commonly stress, anxiety and depression – was our highest cause of absence." These figures are in line with rates in the general UK working population where mental health issues are the single biggest cause of sickness absence.

The third driver for change was the desire to empower our staff to support students who are experiencing mental health issues. Helen says: "Thankfully, we experience few critical incidents but when they did occur, we had robust process in place to provide support to the peer groups and families of students affected. However, we didn't offer the kind of training that staff need to be able to support students who are experiencing a mental health issue. Whether they are a dissertation supervisor, a tutor, or administrative staff, these people are talking to and dealing with students on a day to day basis and we didn't feel they had been given the training to have some of those difficult conversations. This was another major driver – to give them the tools to handle this type of situation."

Once the gap in staff support had been identified, Helen and her team set about finding an appropriate training programme to help managers develop an understanding around stress, wellbeing and mental health. Jo Hardy, Health and Safety Adviser came across MHFA England's training through a colleague. Jo says, "What piqued our interest in MHFA was that a member of university staff had attended a course independently and spoke very highly of it. From her report, we could see that it had high potential to be rolled out at the university."

Around the decision to choose MHFA training, Jo explains: "As a university it was essential for us to choose a training programme with a solid evidence base that would be able to stand up to rigorous scrutiny. The more we researched it the more we could see how MHFA would apply to any university community."

Rather than booking instructors to come in and deliver training, the University of York chose to put a member of staff through the MHFA Instructor Training programme. Jo stepped up to the challenge and qualified as an MHFA instructor in November 2015. Shortly afterwards, Jo began delivering in-house MHFA Two Day and Half Day courses to her colleagues.

Once Jo was qualified as an MHFA instructor, places on the courses were initially offered through the university's Mental Health First Contact Network which staff could apply to join.

Jo comments, "We had a series of drop in sessions where people could turn up and find out more about what MHFA involves and register their interest to attend a course. There was such a positive response. By the time we released it more widely to give all staff outside the network the opportunity to attend, there was a long waiting list and it has been fully booked ever since."

Results

Of the training model, Jo says: "The fact that we had this option of training an in-house instructor was another reason why we chose MHFA training. It has given us 100% flexibility on when we deliver the courses, and how many, which is brilliant given the busy teaching timetables of academic staff. That's also why we chose to offer half day as well as two day courses. Being able to meet people halfway has been very practical.

"We use the half day course to raise awareness around mental health, but once people get a taste of it they often want to come on the two day course to become a Mental Health First Aider. A lot of managers attend the half day course, learn what it's all about, then they go away and think about how it will apply to their team. We then get some repeat business from that department."

Staff confidence to help someone experiencing a mental health issue:

17%

before the course

92%

after the course

Results (cont.)

Feedback has been positive with 100% of staff who have attended the training saying they would recommend it to a colleague. Qualitative feedback has included comments such as “Everyone should do this training” and “I can’t think of anyone in the university who it wouldn’t be relevant to.” Jo jokes, “MHFA has been so well received - as a health and safety trainer I’m not used to people getting excited about my training!”

Evaluations have yielded similarly positive data. The university ran a survey of employees before MHFA training and up to six months afterwards, asking people to rate themselves in terms of confidence helping someone who was experiencing a mental health issue. Before the course, 17% of people scored themselves 7/10 or more on confidence, which increased to 92% of people feeling confident to help after the course.

And the university culture around mental health has improved. Helen comments, “We’ve observed a cultural shift where we no longer have to explain why as an organisation we need mental health awareness and skills training. People accept that mental health is an important issue now.”

Places on Jo’s MHFA courses are now advertised through the staff wellbeing website, Well@York, which Helen’s team has created as a hub for information, resources and support on the topics of ‘Get fit’, ‘Eat well’ and ‘Feel good’. The website links to quality health resources such as articles and podcasts, external sources of information and support, and gives staff the opportunity to take part in campus activities and awareness events.

With a whole organisation approach to not only mental health but to a person’s whole wellbeing, multiple departments collaborate to make Well@York a comprehensive resource for staff. Helen says, “Our staff deserve to be as healthy as they can be at work and we want our project to reflect that all areas of health impact on each other. Accordingly, rather than setting up our own separate programmes and activities we work together. For example, to mark Stress Awareness Day this year we asked our colleagues in the sports department to organise free yoga and meditation classes for staff. We advocate that healthy eating, social activities and exercise can all have a positive impact on mental health, and vice versa.”


The project is reinforced by strong links with local organisations such as York Mind, who have delivered staff mindfulness sessions in return for fundraising support.

As well as linking people to quality information and activities, the Well@York site is also a portal for staff to access support both through online tools such as a ‘Stress Pathway’ tool, and for face-to-face counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme.

What the future holds

The Health and Wellbeing Project team plans to continue developing the Well@York hub and rolling out MHFA training flexibly to staff as demand requires. Helen notes, “We have an extraordinarily high employee engagement index compared to other universities – 9 out of 10 of our staff say they are proud to work for the University of York. People say that they are proud to work for an employer that cares about mental health and offers this type of training. Ensuring that staff feel supported and cared for is a key part of why we have been able to achieve such high engagement, and we are going to continue this important work.”

Jo emphasises the energy and enthusiasm of the University of York’s staff in wanting to take MHFA training: “People have been so keen to learn the skills to help, and have really taken their learning to heart when they do. It’s so rewarding and a real credit to our workforce.”



“People have been so keen to learn the skills to help, and have really taken their learning to heart when they do. It’s so rewarding and a real credit to our workforce.”

Jo Hardy, Health & Safety Adviser and MHFA instructor, University of York

A photograph of four young adults (three women and one man) smiling and laughing together outdoors. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Case study: Liberty Living

“Mental Health First Aid is vital to what we do in that it gives us the skills to spot if a student is struggling and offer them the appropriate support.”

Started MHFA training

February 2015

Staff trained so far

500

“As well as being an important skill for their career, MHFA training helps our staff to look after their own mental wellbeing and support each other.”

**Chris Lincoln,
Learning and Development
Manager**

From Aberdeen to Southampton, 25,000 students choose Liberty Living as their term time home. As a leading purpose built student accommodation provider, Liberty Living's joined up approach to student and staff wellbeing is essential for achieving their award winning status. At 50 universities across the UK, each residence contains anywhere from 150 to 1,000 beds and to make sure they can give these students the best experience possible, the company invests seriously in training for their 450 staff.

Why we started training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is one of several training programmes that Liberty Living provides for its staff as an essential part of their development: first aid, customer service, cultural awareness, health and safety, and conflict management among others. Chris Lincoln, Liberty Living's Learning and Development Manager says:

“As an accommodation provider, we have a duty of care to our students. We want our students to enjoy their time at university and a crucial part of this is their accommodation, and as such our staff need to be able to provide them with the care they deserve.”

As part of providing this holistic support, it is crucial for staff to be able to recognise when students are struggling – and to know what to do in an emergency. Chris says, “MHFA is vital to what we do in that it gives us the skills to spot if a student needs support. Our previous Training Officer, Zandria Barclay, attended a presentation by MHFA England and was very impressed with the case studies she was shown. The tailored training offer showed that MHFA England really understood our industry. She reported back that the tools provided by these courses were ideal for our staff and our company.”

100%

of staff trained rated
the course as 'very good'
or 'extremely good'

But alongside providing better support for students, rolling out MHFA training was equally driven by the motivation to support staff wellbeing. Chris explains, "As a business we're very people focused. MHFA is not only an important set of skills for their career, it helps staff to look after their own mental wellbeing and support each other too."

The training model chosen by Liberty Living includes a blend of the different MHFA courses on offer.

'Front line' staff such as housekeepers and maintenance workers generally take Mental Health Aware Half Day courses, while all office based staff and management take MHFA One Day courses to become Mental Health Champions. This intensive course gives them an understanding of the issues relating to mental health in the higher education environment, the skills to spot early signs of mental health issues and the confidence to signpost someone towards the appropriate support.

Results

"People are very keen to do the training. Whilst technically mandatory for our front line staff, we've never had to enforce it," says Chris. And when they complete the course: "The feedback has been 100% positive. We run surveys so that staff can feed back on the training they receive as part of their development, and people have always rated the MHFA courses as 'very good' or 'extremely good'."

As a qualified Mental Health First Aider himself, Chris has his own experience of MHFA training, having taken both the one day and two day courses. He says, "The content is delivered in such a way that you can process it easily. It can touch upon some heavy subjects so the approachable way they deliver it is so important. From both of the courses I attended, I came away feeling much more knowledgeable and confident around dealing with mental health."

Going beyond being equipped to intervene when a student is struggling or help in an emergency, Liberty Living also works proactively to build rapport while creating a positive, open culture around mental health. "We want to make sure our students know that we are there to support them," says Chris. "We use little incentives to get the students to drop by the office and chat, such as free fruit on Fridays, and we then take that opportunity to talk to them and see how they are doing."

Posters promoting initiatives such as Mental Health Awareness Week are put up in the common areas, and regular events encourage students to get together and to interact with accommodation staff. By circulating information about mental health and supporting awareness campaigns, Chris and his colleagues hope to empower students to actively seek support should they need it.

This preventative approach can ultimately mean that a person has the information they need to seek support before a mental health issue gets worse.

Feedback suggests that Liberty Living staff's solid foundation of mental health skills and awareness has been a valuable support to students experiencing mental ill health. Chris explains, "We have received letters from students and parents thanking us for our support." One parent said: "I really appreciate how quickly you responded and the care and understanding you have shown our daughter throughout her illness and recovery. It made the world of difference and now she is in a better position to focus on her studies."

What the future holds

Liberty Living plans to continue delivering MHFA courses to all new staff as they come on board as part of their employee training. Its student experience team have more mental health awareness events and activities in the pipeline for engaging students and continuing to foster that open, stigma-free culture. The accommodation provider is a great example of a whole organisation approach to mental health – as Chris puts it, "Mental health is absolutely central to what we do."

MHFA courses

There are a variety of options for MHFA courses to suit your organisation. Every course is delivered by an experienced instructor who has attended the seven day Instructor Training programme accredited by the Royal Society for Public Health. Our quality assured instructors have been selected due to their diverse training and education backgrounds, their passion for mental health, and their ability to engage and motivate participants.

Higher Education MHFA One Day



One Day

This intensive mental health awareness and skills course has been created in consultation with leading student mental health charity **Student Minds**, piloted in 16 universities and evaluated by the University of Chester.

Maximum capacity

We limit numbers to 16 people per course so that the instructor can keep people safe and supported while they learn.

Course outline

As a one day course, it fits into the busy academic calendar and can be scheduled at any time of year.

Learning takes place through a mix of presentations, group discussions and workshop activities.

Session 1

- Mental Health First Aid
- What is mental health?
- Impact of mental health issues
- Stigma and discrimination
- What is depression?
- What is an anxiety disorder?
- Alcohol, drugs and mental health
- First aid for depression and anxiety
- Cognitive distortions and CBT

Session 2

- Suicide figures and risk factors
- First aid for suicidal crisis
- Self-harm
- First aid for self-harm
- Eating disorders
- First aid for eating disorders
- Psychosis
- First aid for psychosis
- Recovery
- Building a mentally healthy HE community

Learning outcomes

- A deeper understanding of the issues that relate to student and staff mental health
- Skills to spot early signs of mental ill health
- Confidence to signpost someone towards support – whether that's through self-help resources, university counselling services, the NHS, or a mix
- Knowledge and confidence to advocate for mental health awareness

Everyone who completes the course gets:

- A Higher Education MHFA manual and workbook to refer to whenever they need it
- A certificate of attendance to say they are a **Higher Education MHFA Champion**

Adult MHFA Two Day



Two Day

Our two day course is not bespoke to a Higher Education environment but has been designed to work across sectors.

Maximum capacity

We limit numbers to 16 people per course so that the instructor can keep people safe and supported while they learn.

Course outline

Learning takes place across four manageable sessions which can be scheduled flexibly.

Through a mix of group activities, presentations and discussions, each session is built around a Mental Health First Aid action plan.

Session 1

Mental Health First Aid, mental health, and depression

Session 2

Depression (cont.) and suicidal crisis

Session 3

Anxiety, personality disorders, eating disorders and self-harm

Session 4

Psychosis, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder

Learning outcomes

- An in depth understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect wellbeing
- Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues
- Confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress
- Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening
- Knowledge to help someone recover their health by guiding them to appropriate support - whether that's self-help resources, university counselling services, the NHS, or a mix

Everyone who completes the course gets:

- An MHFA manual and workbook to refer to whenever they need it
- A certificate of attendance to say they are a **Mental Health First Aider**

Adult Mental Health Aware Half Day



Half Day

Our four hour mental health awareness session is delivered through a mix of group activities, presentation and discussion.

It is not bespoke to a Higher Education environment but has been designed to work across sectors.

Maximum capacity

25

Learning outcomes

- An understanding of what mental health is and how to challenge stigma
- A basic knowledge of some common mental health issues
- An introduction to looking after your own mental health and maintaining wellbeing
- Confidence to support someone in distress or who may be experiencing a mental health issue

Everyone who completes the course gets:

- An MHFA manual to refer to whenever they need it
- A workbook including a helpful toolkit to support their own mental health
- A certificate of attendance to say they are **Mental Health Aware**

Instructor Training programme

Accredited by the Royal Society for Public Health, our seven day Instructor Training programme gives participants all the tools needed to deliver successful MHFA courses.



Instructors

Although many organisations are keen to have our independent instructors deliver our courses, some decide to train a member of their own staff as an MHFA instructor. Once qualified they can deliver MHFA courses in a timeframe and method which 100 per cent suits the needs of the organisation.

Structure

Instructor Training takes place over seven days and is usually spread out over six weeks. This allows you to become familiar with the material and reflect on your learning. You'll have access to a mentor throughout who will be happy to help if you need any guidance along the way.

Days one–two

Experience a two day MHFA course as delivered by our highly experienced National Trainers.

Day three

Hear from a variety of speakers from a mental health related background.

These sessions could include discussions with people who have experienced mental health issues, a carer of someone with mental ill health, or someone from a medical background.

Days four–five

Your chance to deliver a session on a relevant topic followed by a one to one feedback session with your mentor.

Days six–seven

Deliver a of the MHFA course, gain peer to peer feedback and have another one to one session with your mentor.

You will be expected to do approximately 20 hours of your own study outside of the seven days, including time spent on preparing delivery materials for days four–five and six–seven.

You will have one year of one to one support from your mentor as you get up and running as an MHFA instructor.

Requirements

After completing the Instructor Training programme you will be required to co-deliver two courses within a year to become an approved instructor. Once approved, instructors can deliver courses solo, both in their own organisation and externally.

To remain an MHFA instructor, you will need to do the following each year:

- Deliver two courses, or as many as possible
- Ensure everyone who attends your courses receives a manual and workbook that can be purchased from MHFA England
- Renew your annual membership. The membership fee is £75 as of April 2018
- Attend a continuing professional development event. MHFA England offers CPD events to expand your portfolio of courses (e.g. Higher Education MHFA One Day, Youth MHFA, Armed Forces MHFA). Or you can attend an external event relating to mental health or training skills

Learn more

To learn more about MHFA Instructor Training in your organisation, please contact us at:
training@mhfaengland.org
telephone 020 7250 8062
or visit our website mhfaengland.org.

"It's so rewarding to know I am teaching people the vital skills to support others."

“Healthy learners and healthy staff will increase levels of achievement, performance, productivity and reputation”



UK Healthy Universities Network

Why train with us?



Evidence based

Grounded in research and rigorously tested, our courses are written and developed by experts, with input from people with lived experience of mental health issues



Global

You'll be joining a community of over two million MHFA-trained people in 24 countries around the world



Growing

As the only company licensed to deliver MHFA courses in England, we have 1,800 qualified instructors who have trained over 250,000 people



Trusted

Our quality assurance guarantee means you know you are getting the best in mental health training, every time



Accredited

Our Instructor Training programme is accredited by the Royal Society for Public Health



Community interest company

We're on a mission to end mental health stigma. Any profit we make goes back into the community



MHFA England

Mental Health First Aid starts with you

For details on MHFA course
bookings and delivery options,
please contact us at
info@mhfaengland.org
020 7250 8062

or visit our website
mhfaengland.org



MHFA England